

In 1941, more than 400 men lost their lives in a German U-boat attack in the South Atlantic. It was the final chapter in the life of one marine, whose young widow was already grieving the loss of two sons. **Richard Palmer** recounts the tale.

**T**his November marks the 70th anniversary of the sinking of *HMS Dunedin*. The ship and her crew were unknowingly involved in the greatest secret of World War II: the breaking of the Enigma Code. *HMS Dunedin* met her demise on 24 November 1941 while on an Enigma-inspired operation – along with 85 per cent of her crew. One of the victims was my great-uncle, Joseph Dyer.

I have only recently discovered this family tragedy. I have been researching my family tree for several years and many stories have emerged from my research. However, none has inspired me more than the sequence of tragic events that befell my great-uncle and aunt. When I became aware of them, I had to find out more. This is Joseph's story.

**From cradle to grave**

Joseph, known as Joe, was born in Eastleigh, Hampshire, in 1900, the only son of seven children born to Elizabeth and John Dyer, a road labourer. Two days after his 18th birthday, Joe enlisted as a Royal Marine Artillery Gunner and, following training at the Royal Marines barracks in Eastney, Portsmouth, he joined the first of many ships; including *HMS Royal Oak*; *HMS Coventry* and *HMS Dunedin*.

According to his naval record Joe was 5ft 9.5 ins; had a 'fresh' complexion; grey eyes; brown hair; and a tattoo on his right forearm of a bird bearing a scroll with the words 'Mother'. He received the British War Medal (1923), The Victory Medal (1924), Long Service and Good Conduct Medal (1933).

On 3 August 1935 Joe married 26-year-old Violet May Chandler at St Mary's, Portsea. But within six years, death would have stalked Joe's family, leaving Vi widowed and childless.

The couple had two children, Desmond and Brian. Desmond was born in 1938 but sadly died at three weeks old. Joe was stationed at *HMS Dolphin* at the time, a Royal Naval shore-based establishment in Gosport, Hampshire.

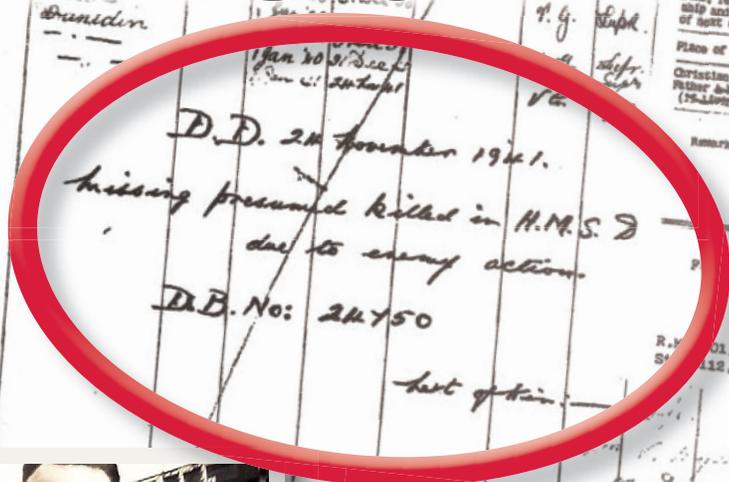
**Joe joins HMS Dunedin**

During the summer of 1939, *HMS Dunedin* was being prepared for war. Following exercises in the North Sea, she returned to Portsmouth on 21 August. In a rapid remobilisation effort, crew arrived by the lorry load. Joe had already reached the end of his marine career, but was

# The Dunedin effect



Fated ship: *HMS Dunedin*.  
Right: Marine Joe Dyer in 1931 and Joe's naval record, showing him 'missing presumed killed'.



<p>How discharge</p> <p>General character awarded on discharge</p> <p>Dated place of residence</p> <p>Num. relationship and address of next of kin</p> <p>Place of discharging</p> <p>Christian name Father &amp; Mother (if living)</p> <p>Remarks</p> <p>compl</p> <p>R. 10/19/39</p> <p>12/21.</p>		
<p>NAME</p> <p>DATE</p> <p>QUALITY</p> <p>DATE</p> <p>QUALITY</p>	<p>OFFICERS (R.M.A. only)</p> <p>Lead Service</p> <p>Resignation</p> <p>Date Received</p> <p>17/1/23</p> <p>12 Aug 24</p> <p>19 Dec 33</p>	<p>Medals, Claws, Etc.</p> <p>Names of Decorations</p> <p>British War Medal</p> <p>Victory Medal</p> <p>U.S. Medal G.B. Medal</p>
<p>WOUNDS AND ILLS, SPECIAL SERVICES, ETC., ETC.</p> <p>Date</p> <p>Particulars</p> <p>24 Aug 1941</p> <p>19 Dec 33</p> <p>U.S. Medal G.B. Medal</p>		